

FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS AND APPLICATIONS FOR U.S. VISAS

**Elizabeth P. Gourlay
Chief, Consular Section
U.S. Embassy, Dhaka**

Persons seeking U.S. visas may need to provide evidence of their family relationships. This is especially true for immigration visas (including DV) and other visas that involve family members applying together. The following points discuss how family photographs, taken regularly, can help applicants for U.S. visas.

Q. When there are official birth certificates and other documents available, why does the U.S. Embassy ask for family photographs?

Ans. Good family photographs can demonstrate relationships without a doubt. For example, additional evidence of a marriage can be pictures: family members with the bride and groom, the signing of the *nikah-namah*, and other wedding events. Unfortunately, fake documents are so common that we cannot rely on official-looking documents alone. Additionally, age information on official documents is not always correct. In other cases, pictures will be able to prove relationships for which no official documents exist. A series of photographs taken year after year can satisfy the questions a consular officer may ask.

Q. My brother won the DV this year, and plans to petition for my family once he arrives in the US. Is it too early to begin taking pictures?

Ans. Absolutely not – we encourage applicants to think far ahead! The longer the time span covered by the photographs, the better they are for the applicants. In your case, your brother will have to wait until he is a US citizen before he can petition for your immigration. Then you will have to wait until your visa number is ready for processing. In total, these steps will likely take ten years or more before your immigration visa interview at the Embassy. Taking several pictures of your immediate family (wife, children, and you) every year at parties and events will be useful for you when you come for your interview, and can show your case in a positive light. Additionally, be sure you take pictures with your brother before he leaves, and whenever he come back to Bangladesh for visits.

Q. *At my first interview, I was asked for a picture of all my family members together. We don't have one, so I paid someone at a computer shop to make one out of the different pictures we do have. But when I presented this picture, the officer said it was not real, kept the picture, and denied us the visas. Why did they do this?*

Ans. We are sorry that you misunderstood the consular officer's request. Unfortunately, using a computer (or scissors and paste) to create a picture that was not actually taken with all persons shown in the image is considered to be a type of fraud. It is our policy to keep fake documents and pictures. If you don't have real pictures, the consular officer will advise you on other ways you can prove your family relationships.

Q. *My mother is a very religious person and does not believe in photographs. Also, we are poor, and cannot afford a camera or photographer. How can we take family photographs?*

Ans. Unfortunately, individual photographs are required without exceptions for visa applications, and for getting a passport. If your mother wants to travel to the U.S., she will be required to take pictures for these documents. Beyond these documents, she does not have to take pictures. Regarding the expense – if you cannot afford to pay for a few pictures, you will probably face difficulties paying for the other costs related with travel to America! However, your relative in the US should be able to send you a cheap disposable camera once a year which you could use and have processed inexpensively.

Please remember that family pictures are not a requirement, but can be very helpful. Family relationships can be proven by other means. In some cases, we request applicants provide DNA tests: these tests cost approximately \$650 for one child and two parents. Compared to DNA testing, photographs are a relatively inexpensive and convenient way to demonstrate family relationships.

=====

***Ask the Consul** is a series of periodic articles discussing U.S. Visas. The next **Ask the Consul** article will discuss the U.S. Student Visas.

GR/ February 12, 2007

Note: A Bangla translation of this article is also available from the American Center. If you are interested in the translation, please call the American Center Press Section (Tel: 8837150-4, Fax: 9885688; e-mail: DhakaPA@state.gov; Website: [http:// dhaka.usembassy.gov](http://dhaka.usembassy.gov)